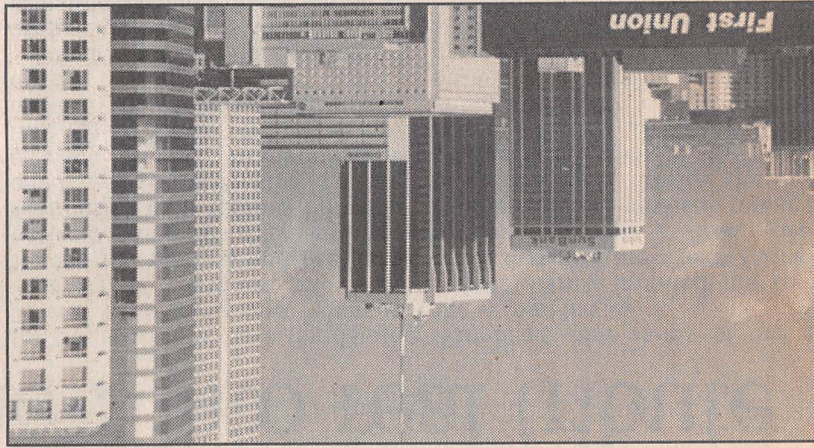
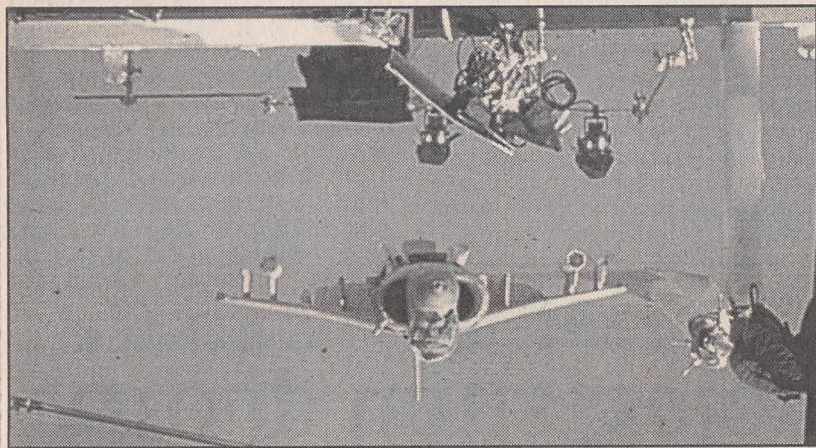




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Group turns 'Solomon' into real tribute

By DONALD ROSENBERG
PLAIN DEALER MUSIC CRITIC

Handel's dramatic oratorio "Solomon" is a celebration of justice, prosperity and benevolence. With its dedication of a temple, "Solomon" is particularly apt to mark the anniversary of a house of worship. The Old Stone Singers paid tribute to their home Sunday by offering the Handel as part of Old Stone Church's 175th anniversary festivities. It was a grand undertaking that went far in revealing the beauties within this neglected score.

The event may have been the first complete "Solomon" in Cleveland, which is understandable. The oratorio has received few uncut performances since its London premiere in 1748, partly because it is a massive piece of some three hours' length requiring double chorus, soloists and orchestra. In the 19th century, Victorian censors even deemed the oratorio's depiction of married love and Act II confrontation between two harlots too juicy for public consumption.

MUSIC REVIEW

Old Stone Singers

While "Solomon" is bogged down by some formulaic writing, even from Handel's inspired perspective, the oratorio overflows with glorious ideas. The chorus, often divided into eight parts, provides the focus with stirring statements of praise and poignant commentary. Many of the arias and duets are affecting and luminous character explorations.

Sunday's performance was most illuminating in choral terms. The Old Stone Singers, a superb professional ensemble, provided robust tonal resources and firm blends in the extroverted material and artistry of utmost warmth in the tender passages. The placement of the choristers on either side of the orchestra allowed Handel's counterpoint to emerge in stereophonic splendor.

Warren Scharf, co-director of music at Old Stone, conducted an account that demonstrated love

for the score and care for detail. There were moments when a shortage of rhythmic buoyancy slowed the motion, and the gaps between numbers suggested unfamiliarity with tempos between conductor and orchestra. Yet the essence of each number came through as Scharf and forces immersed themselves in Handel's drama.

Laura Talpas-Avdey's singing of the title role was noble and direct. She used her dusky mezzo to sensitive effect, connecting the long lines into meaningful phrases and shifting registers smoothly, aside from a bit of stress on high. As Solomon's queen, Coeli Ingold sounded pure and nimble, although her delicate soprano sometimes was overpowered even by a few instruments.

The bold center of the work is the scene in which Solomon judges the case of two harlots who are fighting over a child. The real mother was sung by Lisa Rainsong, whose bright, agile soprano brought touching intensity to the woman's plight. Carole

Winehardt had plenty of fire as the second harlot.

Allie Laurie applied his light tenor deftly to the priest Zadok's pronouncements, while Ray Liddle supplied majestic nuances to the baritone lines of the Levite. As the Queen of Sheba, soprano Virginia Bruozis-Muliolis exuded vivacity, catapulting her duties with shining timbre and dramatic flair. Nathan Wesselowski revealed a fresh tenor in his brief lines as an attendant.

Harpsichordist Margaret Scharf and members of the Ohio Chamber Orchestra played with stylish assurance throughout the performance, despite evidence of insufficient rehearsal. Cellist Kent Collier did vivid work in the continuo, and concertmaster Alcestis Perry was a model of flexibility and taste in her assignments alone and with colleagues. The oboes and bassoons brought clarity, point and regal inflection to their Handelian demands.

Old Stone could hardly have come up with a more ambitious or dignified anniversary bash.